

## *Safe at Home*

*October 18, 2005*

We're going to be sitting for an hour, so try to get comfortable. Try to sit comfortably straight. You don't have to sit with your back straight like a soldier, but straight enough so that you're not putting any undue weight on the different organs in your body. Face straight ahead and close your eyes.

Then think comfortable thoughts for the mind. A very comfortable thought is goodwill. Goodwill is a desire for happiness: your own happiness and the happiness of everyone around you. Just tell yourself, "May I find true happiness." And think a little bit about what that means. It'll have to come from within, because the things that come from outside—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations—don't last. They come and they go. True happiness has to be something that doesn't depend on them. So it has come from within the mind, from training what resources you have in the mind.

The good thing about true happiness is that it doesn't take anything away from anyone else. It's not like the happiness and pleasures of the world, where if you gain something, somebody else has to lose it. Your true happiness doesn't conflict with anybody else's true happiness. So spread thoughts of goodwill to other people, too. Start with people who are close your heart—your family, your very close friends: May they find true happiness. Then spread that thought out in ever-widening circles: to people you know well and like, to people you don't know so well, to people you're totally neutral about, and to people don't like. Don't let there be any limitations on your goodwill.

Think about that for a minute. If everyone in the world could find true happiness within, no one would be cruel. No one would be abusive to others. They wouldn't have any need to. All the people who do things you don't like probably wouldn't do those things. So you don't gain anything from anybody else's suffering. In fact, the world would be a better place if people didn't cause themselves suffering, if they could find true happiness within.

So be very generous with your goodwill. Spread thoughts of goodwill to people you don't even know about, and not just people—all living beings of all kinds: east, west, north, south, above, and below, out to infinity. May we all find true happiness.

Now bring your attention back to the present moment. What have you got right here? What are the resources you're going to develop? You've got the body sitting here breathing, and you've got the mind thinking and aware. Put all those

things together. It's by putting them together that they develop. Think about your breath and be alert to how the breathing feels. When it comes in, know it's coming in. When it goes out, know it's going out. Be alert to how it feels. Try a couple good, long, deep in-and-out breaths, and then let the breath settle into a rhythm that feels comfortable: not too long, not too short, not too deep, not too shallow. It feels just right coming in, just right going out.

The breath is something we don't pay too much attention to, but it's something very useful. It stands to reason that if your breathing feels comfortable, things throughout the body will feel a lot more comfortable as well.

This is one very immediate, very visceral way of showing goodwill for yourself right here, right now. If you breathe in a way that tense, it's going to block the circulation in different of parts the body. They'll get numb after a while. So think of the breath coming in throughout the whole body, through every pore of the skin. Wherever you notice any tension in the body, think of relaxing it. You might want to survey the different parts of the body to see which parts you tend to tense up as you breathe in, or where you're holding on to tension as you breathe out. If you notice that happening, allow those spots to relax, so that there's no tension building up as you breathe in, and no holding on to tension as you breathe out.

As for any thoughts that come in, just let them go. You don't have to get involved. This is a time for the mind right now to get to know itself, to get to know the resources you've got here in the present moment. This is a very important place to be, the present moment. Everything that really happens to your life happens in the present moment, yet for most part you're not here. You're off someplace else, so you don't really see what's happening. Thoughts come, thoughts go, you latch on to something, and you don't really know where it's going to take you, because you're not paying careful attention.

So for the time being, make it a rule inside your mind that you're not to go with any thought. If you catch yourself slipping off, just come right back to the breath. The breath is very forgiving. It keeps on coming in and going out no matter what you do. So just come back and get comfortable with the breath again. And don't get upset by the fact you've wandered off. It's normal. Everybody does it. What makes a difference in meditation is that you don't give in. You just keep coming back, coming back, coming back until it feels more and more natural to be with the breath than to go wandering off.

In this way, you give the mind a home. After all, you can't really live in your thoughts. They're like bubbles floating out. They pop. Then you find yourself coming up back here looking for another bubble. You get into that bubble and it pops, too. Sometimes these bubbles can carry you pretty far away before they pop,

and you find yourself landing far away on a hillside or in the forest, in a river, places that are really hard to get back from. In other words, these thoughts don't just float around. They leave traces. They can make you angry. They can make you upset. They can make you sad. They can give rise to lust, fear. They can create all kinds of things that are really harmful to the mind and leave you in bad states of mind.

One of the purposes of meditation is to be able to sit here in the present moment and see a thought form and to decide very clearly whether it's worth going with or not. After all, some thoughts really are useful. They can help give rise to discernment, give rise to concentration, give rise to understanding. They can be very useful. Others are not so useful, so you have to learn how to figure out which is which so that you can really be in control of your mind.

The best place to see them is right here in the present moment. They tend to point away, but they actually happen in the present moment. The little worlds they create maybe in another place in another time. But you don't want to get sucked into those worlds. You want to put yourself in a solid position so that you can see them form but without going along with them.

It's like driving past an outdoor movie theater. You can see the colors flashing up on the screen—yellow, red, green—and if you stop to watch, you begin to see the colors as actually being people up there on the screen. There's a story going on, and you suddenly find yourself sucked into the movie screen. But if you can learn how to stay very conscious of yourself standing right there, and the colors just as colors flashing, you're in a much better position to decide whether to go with that story or not. And you can pull yourself out if you see that it's a horror story or something really cheap and trashy. You can tell yourself, "I don't want to go there." Just stay on the level of the colors flashing and you'll be okay.

What you're doing is giving yourself a new relationship to your thoughts. You see that they're constructed. Some of the impetus to think those thoughts comes from your past intentions, but you also have your present intentions as to whether to get involved with them or not. All too often, that choice is made without your really being aware of it. But the more stable your home here in the present moment, the more clearly you see how this happening, and you're in a better position to make wise choices as to which thoughts you want to go with it, which thoughts you just leave up there on the screen without getting involved.

Most of us are like a person standing on the side of a road on a hot day. Somebody becomes driving up and says, "Hey, come on, jump in." You jump in and you go. Then you ask, "Who are you? Where are we going?" But that's kind of late. If you have a strong sense of feeling at home here in the present moment, the

situation is more like someone coming knocking at the door of your house and inviting you out. You're in a much better position to make a wise choice because you don't feel compelled to jump in. There has to be a good reason go out. You're already nice and comfortable in your home. If somebody is inviting you out into a rainstorm, you say, "No thanks." You're more comfortable here, and as a result you're more in control, because you're not operating out of a hunger or a sense of discomfort in the present moment. You're coming from a position of comfort and strength. That changes the balance of power.

So you've got a whole hour to sit here. Don't think of it as a torture or an ordeal. It's an opportunity to get to know the present moment. You've got a whole hour of present moments, a whole hour of breaths that you can watch. The more you can learn about how to get on good terms with the breath in the present moment, the better off you'll be.